

MOUNTAIN PLOVER
(*Charadrius montanus*)

STATUS: Proposed threatened (64 FR 7587, 1999) with no critical habitat.

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The mountain plover is a small bird (about 17.5 cm) (7 in), about the size of a killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*). It is light brown above with a lighter colored breast, but lacks the contrasting dark breastbelt common to many other plovers. During the breeding season it has a white forehead, a white stripe above the eye, and a dark line between the beak and eye, which contrasts with the dark crown. During winter, the dark line is absent and the crown is lighter, but the white eyestripe and white forehead remain. The voice of the bird is low with a variable whistle.

HABITAT: Mountain plover breeding habitat is known to include short-grass prairie (vegetation less than 10 cm (4 in) tall) and shrub-steppe landscapes; dryland, cultivated farms; and prairie dog towns. Short vegetation, bare ground, and a flat topography are recognized as habitat-defining characteristics at both breeding and wintering locales. Breeding occurs in the Western Great Plains and Colorado plateau from 1220 to 2140 m (approx. 4,000 to 7,200 ft). Plovers usually nest on sites where vegetation is sparse or absent, due to disturbance by herbivores, including domestic livestock and prairie dogs. Mountain plovers are rarely found near water. They may be found on heavily grazed pastures throughout their breeding range and may selectively nest in or near prairie dog towns. Wintering mountain plovers generally arrive in Arizona in November, and begin leaving for breeding areas by mid-March and may make a nonstop migration to breeding grounds. Although cultivated land is used by wintering mountain plovers and is more abundant than non-cultivated land, mountain plovers appear to prefer alkali flats, burned grasslands, and livestock-grazed annual grasslands to cultivated sites. Wintering habitat elevation is variable but generally occurs in valley bottoms below 300 m (1,000 ft).

RANGE: Historic: Historically, breeding mountain plovers were reported as locally rare to abundant, and widely distributed in the Great Plains region from Canada south to Texas. Mountain plovers have been observed during the winter in California, Arizona, Texas, and Nevada. Grazing herbivores historically dominated the grassland landscape at both breeding and wintering sites, and their grazing, wallowing, and burrowing activities created and maintained a mosaic of vegetation and bare ground to which mountain plovers became adapted.

Current: Species is primarily found in Rocky Mountain states from Canada to Texas. Arizona primarily provides wintering habitat for the species. Breeding has been documented in Apache County, Arizona, but it is rare. In Arizona, Mountain Plover have been located in Yuma, Pima, Cochise, Pinal, and Apache counties.

REASONS FOR DECLINE/VULNERABILITY: Mountain plover habitat is threatened by the conversion of grasslands to croplands and urban uses, domestic livestock management, and other land uses (e.g., prairie dog control, mineral development) throughout mountain plover breeding and wintering range.

LAND MANAGEMENT / OWNERSHIP: Tribal, State, and Federal Lands

NOTES: Forest Service Sensitive Species.

A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey protocol for breeding mountain plovers was completed in 1999 and is available at <http://arizonae.s.fws.gov/>